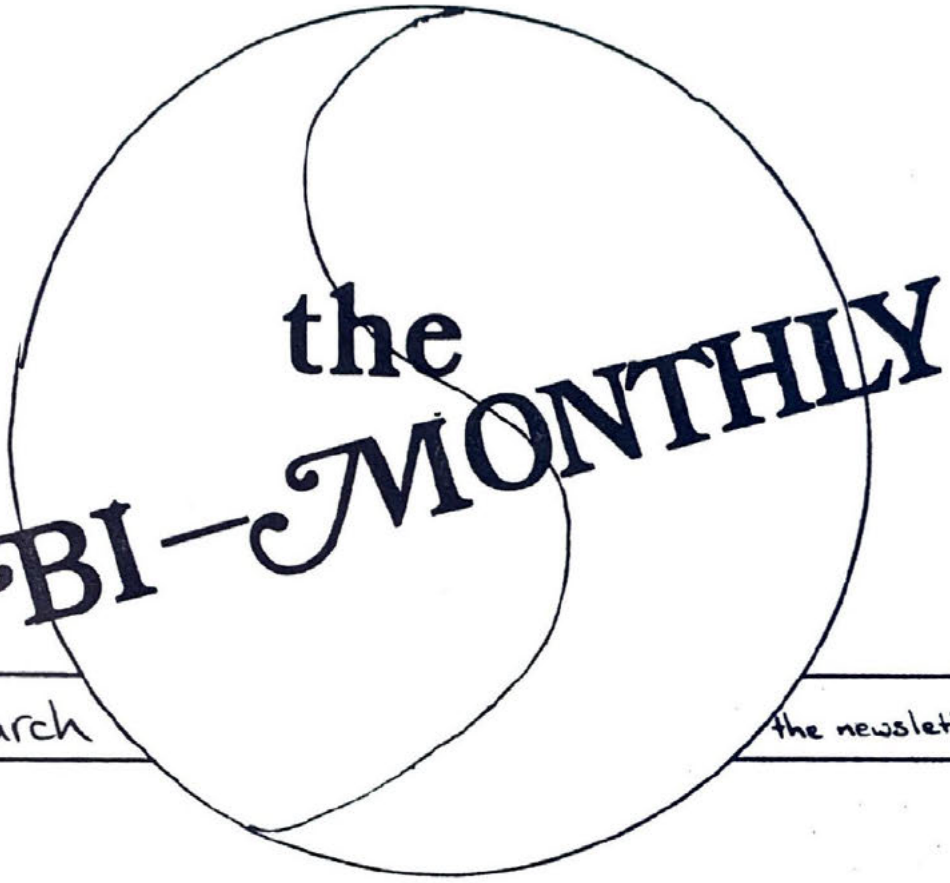


No 2 March

the newsletter for bisexuals

A Sense of Identity

S M

Bi in the Gay World

Definitions

Welcome to the second issue of 'The Bi-Monthly'.

Our heartfelt thanks to everyone who contributed material this time round. If your article hasn't been included don't worry, we haven't thrown it away, just held it over for a future issue. But keep on sending your scribblings to us - if you can't write an article, post us a letter instead. After all, it's nice to know that somebody actually reads this magazine. The next copydate will be May 12th.

The same date will see us totting up the votes in the logo competition, so don't forget to fill in the coupon and send it back.

'Bye until the next ish...

Many thanks to the contributors in this issue; John Barker, David Burkel, Cris Claxton Stevens, Marc Derych, Hilary, Jules Hobday, Jo, Phil Kane, Nadine, Liz Verran and all those who sent in logos for the competition.
Keep it up!

c/o Marc Derych, BM/BT, London WC1N 3XX.

A SENSE OF IDENTITY

CRIS CLAXTON STEVENS

It is an unfortunate feature of so many groups and clubs that only a comparatively few members believe in the aims and benefits of the group strongly enough to be prepared to give time and effort to work actively in the running of it or to further its aims. A great majority are very sympathetic towards it and much enjoy the facilities and advantages that it provides, but are unable or unwilling to do more. This is especially so when the group concerned stands for the furthering of a cause against which an ignorant society in general is prejudiced and which could lead to embarassment at home or work in individual cases. This is certainly true of a majority of people in the London Bisexual Group.

I am not trying to suggest that everyone should spontaneously 'come out' regardless of the consequences - the oppression and unhappiness that could result. Yet there are ways in which everyone can help. It is all too easy to bury one's head in the sand and forget how fortunate we are to have a place and a group of friends with whom we can feel comfortable. Do we not have a responsibility to thousands of other bisexuals, female and male, isolated all over the country who do not have this facility, who live in uncertainty about their own feelings and often imagine that they must be the only people in the world who feel the way they do? If we feel gratitude for the help that the LBG gives us, the opportunities we have to make friends and discuss our problems and experiences with people who understand, then should we not try to help others to do so as well ?

I would not pretend that the membership, activities and meeting place of the LBG suits everyone who comes along, although we are always open to new ideas and suggestions: indeed a lot of people seem to come once or twice and then disappear. But at least they know we exist: the LBG stands as a focal point.

Now, if we are to make ourselves known in wider circles, I would suggest that, as a first stage before we think of becoming active politically or vociferous in publicity, we need an IDENTITY - a definition of what we stand for which may be both easily associated with and accepted by bisexuals all over the country, and which may also be put forward plainly in our seeking for greater acceptance by society. After all, this has got to be the most effective way of helping others in the long run, and the impetus must come from us at the focal point. The birth of this Newsletter and the seeking of a suitable logo are both very important steps in this direction. It is planned to spread the Newsletter far and wide to disseminate information and publicity, and I would most earnestly hope that it will also be used as a vehicle for discussion and opinion so that this identity may be formulated.

This will not be easy. The very diversity of our membership, of which many of us are so proud, serves to increase the problem to dilute a positive definition. Yet positive it must be. The term 'gay' has often been used in a broad sense to include bisexuals and it has even been suggested that bisexuals do not exist at all. I believe that we stand more chance of acceptance if we are not looked upon as part of the

the Gay Movement: sympathetic andsupportive, yes, but not lost in the prejudices and image of of the gay world, which I think can often be harmful to us. Neither must we be seen in the negative grey area of neither homosexual or heterosexual. We should stand for positive and desirable freedom of choice and anti-prejudice: a very different thing to closed clans of queens separating themselves from bands of butch dykes (I deliberately choose extremes). Whether people are female, male, transexual, asexual, married, single or whatever, we welcome them as individuals.

No two people are in the same situation, or have identical problems, yet we surely have one thing in common - we can be, to varying degrees, attracted to either sex physically and can form an emotional relationship with either. I would like to suggest this as a statement on which to build and which I hope will invite comment in further issues of the Newsletter.

B

WHY SM IS UNACCEPTABLE

LIZ VERRAN

I object to the practice of sadomasochism, for myself or others, not on grounds of prudery or sexual inhibition but for political reasons.

By using SM we are accepting the victim image society has tried to put on women and gays and has used against us as an excuse for attacking us. We need to fight against our own masochism - conditioned into us. What attracts us to SM is the patriarch in our heads, which needs to be exorcised not acted out.

The degree of consent is influenced by the impossibility of our knowing who we would be in a free, equal world. We are in a male supremacist world, which glories in domination and we, as outsiders, are manipulated by its ideas. We act out the self-hatred it has taught us, either as victim or as sadist, too frightened to be vulnerable and equal but needing to control.

SM is based on dominance/submission and humiliation. These are the very practises in society that express misogyny. Consent does not remove the effects of SM behaviour in reinforcing fascism, racism, sexism etc. Games are tools used to explore behaviours which we may then want to take up for real: boys are taught fighting and girls home-making in games, so too abuse is taught in SM games.

What you do is not "in private" in the sense of not affecting anyone else. If there were no knock-on effects, society would not fear sexual alternatives. Whose liberation is SM for? Your freedom to hurt is my oppression. Your 'freedom' upholds the power imbalance in society which I suffer from. Freedom is freedom <u>from</u> racism, sexism, class exploitation, not the right for the privileged to increase their opportunities even into the realm of fantasy. The 'sexual liberation' of the 60s was such a con, so that women could be condemned as prudes for saying "no" to any form of sex and men reaped all the benefits. We don't mistake such names again - <u>Women's</u> Liberation includes our right to draw the line at anything which treats us as less than fully human personalities and just uses our bodies.

By acting out Nazi/Jew and white owner/black slave scenarios we are desensitising ourselves to the re-emergence of fascism in our country. Our political conscience is being deadened. If we want fantasies, why not look at positive images? If we want alternative sexuality - how about sensuality, warmth and communication?

Bisexual Adventures in the Gay World

NADINE

I applied to work as a volunteer on Gay Switchboard in October last year. The first question on the form reads: "How would you identify your sexual orientation?"

Being the honest woman I am, I inked in 'Bisexual'. And for that reason I was rejected in November.

I needed an explanation, so I called Gay Swithboard and asked to speak with a woman. None was available - which isn't surprising because there are 8 women and 80 men on Gay Swithboard.

The man who talked at me was curt, stating that GS is GAY Switchboard and that its policy is for its workers to be and identify as gay. He didn't see that he was doing to me precisely what our hetero-sexist society does to both of us -oppresses. Nor did he see any point in discussing the matter further.

hung up furious. Does hat mean all GS callers are esbians or gay men? How about isexual callers? Doesn't GS gree that a woman who lives in he straight and lesbian/gay worlds has as much or more to offer to callers (especially coming out callers) as someone who lives and works in the gay community? Maybe GS discredits my lesbian feelings and experiences because a part of me is straight? Kate Millet wrote in Flying "Homosexuality was invented by a straight world dealing with its own bisexuality".

I wrote a letter to Capital Gay about this incident. It was published with the same reply from GS.

Having come out in the States where the Gay Movement and the Women's Movement are liberal and progressive, I was shocked and disappointed.

I still want to make a contribution to the lesbian/gay/bisexual community because most of my sexual identity lies there.

Now I ask myself and other bisexuals "What do we want?" "Do we want to work with lesbians and gay men?" "Do we want to set up our own bisexual community?" "Should we attend lesbian and gay events?" "Do we need some bisexual-only space?" (Many members of our male-dominated and oriented bisexual group identify as gay).

If the rumours about GS volunteers are true, I think its sad you should hide your heterosexual affairs with each other.

Being bisexual ain't all that bad. The only problems are other people's myths, fears and fantasies about bisexuality.

Feeling like I'm getting the worst of both worlds...

Definitions of Bisexuality

HILARY

The problem of definitions is that people who start out trying to describe what is all too often end up trying to force onto people what they think ought to be. And the more opinions differ about what ought to be, the more riotously luxuriant becomes the jungle of competing definitions. Thus the Womens Movement might be defined by the radical lesbians as a separatist struggle concieved on adversary lines and backed up by some adaptation of Marxist theory; and by a young married woman as her justification for putting pressure on her husband for more "togetherness" and co-operation in the rearing of their children.

When issues are controversial, those who espouse the 'ruling ideology' use the most extreme definitions to frighten ordinary folks away - thus all feminists become lesbian Marxists; all homosexuals become paedophiles; and all bisexuals orgiasts. It is usually such categories who make the front pages of the gutter press.

The influence of the 'ruling ideology' is depressingly clear when it comes to sexuality. If 100% heterosexuality is the norm, the fact that most people have at least occasional contrary feelings must be ignored or redefined out of existence - he's my buddy; she can't be a lesbian, she's married with two kids; it's a schoolgirl crush; he'll grow out of it. If the feelings find real physical expression and the person is found out in a homosexual relationship, then the reality of the heterosexual feelings is ignored and the person is defined as "really a 'queer' after all".

The in-group is always under pressure to preserve its purity by casting out those who do not match up to the 100% criterion. This is not only felt as an external pressure, for it acts on the way people see themselves. Many women would be frightened to contemplate their kisses and cuddles with their friends as part of a continuum leading to overt sexuality, and prefer not to admit even to themselves that they have more real intimacy with them than with their menfolk. The Hite Report showed numbers of men who engaged in homosexual activities, but who claimed they were not gay because they always insisted on a dominant role. Such people son't feel they are a persecuted minority, see no need for a support group, and as long as their feelings and actions don't come under public scrutiny their is nothing to challenge their distorted view of themselves.

If a person dedides that she or he is not just a heterosexual, they are quite likely to gravitate to gay circles. Sadly, they are just as likely in a tight - indeed uptight - little community, to find they must be defined as 100% gay. If married, they are suspected to be esentially frivolous, though for a woman it is UK even to remain married provided one has seen the light and feels "really" lesbian. The political, legal, financial and social pressures employed by society to force heterosexuality on people, especially on women, are so obvious that one tends to deny the reality of such hetero-sexual feelings one does have. And indeed, one does want to feel gay, one does want to belong somewhere. On the other hand, one does not want to overstate. If feelings for the same sex are strong enough to overcome explicit and implicit social pressures, to risk falling foul of the law, losing one's children or livelyhood or reputation, then very likely they are indeed stronger than the acceptably heterosexual ones; not everyone would take such risks on a mere

whim. Yet the extremely radical feminist who proclaims her solidarity with the cause by espousing "lesbian celibacy" (ie she cannot visualise women as sexual partners) would feel a traitor if she got into bed with a man, and probably would not dare ever to admit to wanting to. Sexually she has painted herself into the smallest corner of all.

Claire Rayner gave a talk recently in which she invited us to visualise the whole population strung out across a football field; only a very few at each end, she said, were 100% heterosexual or gay, just a few in the middle were genuinely unconcerned with the sex of their lovers. The vast majority could have led almost any way of life had circumstances, their parents jobs, community, financial pressures or living conditions, or the people they met, been different. The all-inclusive definition of bisexuality would therefore be:
BISEXUALS ARE CAPABLE OF HAVING SEXUAL FEELINGS DIRECTED TOWARDS EITHER SEX, ALTHOUGH VARIOUS PRESSURES MAY HAVE PREVENTED THEIR EXPRESSION.
This is a useful definition because it threatens the status quo; it includes 90% or more of the population and by this criterion bisexuals are not a minority. It is less useful of course, because most of the 90% will not agree with it - but it might make a few of them think!

If the response of the majority of people is to protest "but I never..." then a semi-inclusive definition could be defensible. It would cut out the people whose feelings of either sort had never actually been expressed, and who therefore would never have to face the issue. So:
BISEXUALS HAVE HAD OVERT SEXUAL EXPERIENCE WITH BOTH THE SAME AND THE OPPOSITE SEX
This would include ex-cons who only ever have relations with the same sex when in prison, those who are really x or y but went through a phase, those who experimented in adolescence and in general those who do have a strong preference for one sex or the other. It should be noted that it still includes somewhere in the region of 50% of males and 25% of females by the age of about 40. Even granted social pressures (I do exclude rape!) thatis a lot of people who have demonstrated their adaptability. Not far off half the adult community. It is no part of a definition to state whether something is a bad thing or not - but this definition is a useful tool with which to ask "Many straights and probably tha majority of gays, might call themselves bisexual. Why don't they?"

It is a fact thqt few do. I have met gay people who were previously married, and who do not intend to marry again, and who, as Iexpected, would call themselves gay with a heterosexual past. And similarly one with a steady major relationship punctuated by occasional, very rare, forays of a different sort. This person's spouse calls such a lifestyle heterosexual with the occasional fling, but the gutter press would describe it as "secretly gay". Often, the self- definitions that people adopt may be a matter of chance; htey meet someone who takes them along to the Bi-group, they happen to dislike the people they meet at the gay group or particular features of the gay scene; or a;ternatively they never coma across the term 'bisexual' at all, and are perfectly comfortable with gay friends as well as 'normal' ones. Probably most gays try to define bisexual in a way that excludes them, which prevent issues being raised which might be uncomfortable for them. Hence a working definition such as:
BISEXUALS REALLY DON'T MIND WHICH GENDER THEIR SEXUAL PARTNERS ARE.
It also contains the unstated hint of'the more the merrier' and, as you had it in your first issue "Gay couple seek bi-girl for frolic and fun". Most people - most women anyway - can successfully resist seeing themselves in that way. ▷

Ultimately, the membership of a group tends to give birth to the definition. The way evangelicals feel and behave defines the term evangelical and likewise those who define themselves as bisexual will import meaning into the term. Just as evangelicals may have to overcome the assumption that they are all idiotic, fundamentalist, chanting, singing Jesus freaks, so will bisexuals probably have to resist the application of my last definition in favour of: BISEXUALS RECOGNISE, BOTH IN THEORY AND PRACTICE, THE VALUE OF CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS WITH THOSE OF EITHER SEX.
I like this one. It diverts one away from contemplating what people do in bed, and reminds people that even bisexuals exist from the neck upwards and can think about why they feel as they do.

I am still not sure whether I am one.....

IRONY

WHAT POTENT CHEMISTRY IS THIS
THAT BEWITCHES MY SENSES
WHAT SENSUOUS SEDUCTION TAKES PLACE
WHEN I BEHOLD
THE DELICATE FEATURES
OF YOUR EXQUISITE FACE
A SPELL IS WOVEN
OVER MY SENSIBILITIES
AND I TREMBLE WITH DESIRE
THE BLOOD IN MY VEINS
TURNS TO GASOLENE
IF I MEET YOUR EYES I CATCH FIRE
I WANT YOUR BEAUTY
TO HOLD FORA MOMENT
AS IF IT WERE A POSSESSION
HOW UNFAIR THAT YOU DESIRE
ONLY YOUR OWN SEX
AND INFLAME MY HETEROSEXUAL PASSION
HOW IRONIC THAT WHEN
I'M OPEN TO CHOICE
YOU OFFER ME NO CHOICE AT ALL.

JO

SELF HELP

The Bisexual Self-help Group was formed in December by Nadine as a result of an interest in further exploring ourselves personally and politically as bisexual women and men.
The group provides a safe, confidential place for us to discuss our own feelings and issues. We meet on a regular basis (weekly) and although this means a commitment we have found this has proved worthwhile.
We feel we have grown together and in order to further our experiences, we need more feminist women to participate.
Any feminist women interested please contact Nadine at BM/BI, London WC1N 3XX

Letters

I saw you mentioned in last week's Time Out and, after giving the matter much thought, decided that I really couldn't pass up the opportunity to write to you. This is not a letter written as a whim or on the spur of the moment: indeed it has taken me well over a week to gather together my nerve to put pen to paper!

I came to believe that I was bi-sexual some years ago: at that time I was dating regularly and had had several fumbled attempts at intercourse. I must have been not quite 20 when I realised that I was almost as equally interested in males! My first panicky thought was that I was homosexual - a "bloody queer" but I knew that I wasn't.

Immediately I cut myself off from almost all my friends - certainly I stopped dating - and became wrapped up in my own soul-searching: the 'why me?' exercise. I am now 27 and this thing has haunted me for years: playing havoc with my social life and my every-day relationships with people in general. To a great extent I became withdrawn and my delinquent sexuality became an obsession with me.

At one point I contacted the local Gay Switchboard (surely I couldn't be the only bloke with this 'problem') - frankly they were of little or no help and in fact I was horrified when they sent me a leaflet put out by the Mental Health Council - was I supposed to be some kind of nutter?

Now - years later I can't say that I've come to terms with my sexuality, but I'm a little closer. I have no steady girlfriend (my obsession has put my performance in doubt) but I desperately long to settle down. What I really want to do is to have a heart to heart with someone of my own age who has come to terms with bisexuality ... and to find out how he copes! I live in fear of anyone (family and workmates really) finding out about my doubts. There are, I believe, one or two gay pubs in this area but I don't feel able to go into one: not so much from embarrassment but out of fear of seeing someone I know inside. Like I said, I dread anyone finding out I'm bi - if they think I'm gay I really think I'd kill myself!

The launching of the newsletter and the recent article in the 'Daily Star' has brought us a flood of correspondence. All letters will be answered but please be patient - it may not be as quickly as you or we would wish.
David.

Send your letters to BM/BI, London WC1N 3XX

★★★★★★★★★

Dear Jules and Phil,

congratulations on your big baby bi newsletter!! We're ever so happy and proud,

bi bi for now,
love and support

Nadine

★★★★★★★★★

You sound as if you need a good hug, and all we can do is send you a Newsletter!

I would be most grateful if you could help me to find contacts in a similar standing as myself - even if they are penfriends or you can put me in contact with someone near to Colchester. I hope that you can help me because I don't know quite how to go about finding people who are Bi and not completely gay.
J.A. (Mr.), Colchester

Our list of contacts outside London is small at present and we have none as yet in Colchester. It would be helpful if people writing to us would say whether it's OK for us to pass their name, address or phone number to others in a similar position and give a bit more information about themselves eg age, whether single or married, if so whether partner 'knows', job and other interests, also feelings about their sexuality may be relevant.

This magazine is running personal ads free for an introductory period, so why don't you try one for penfriends. We will forward any letters we receive, marked JAC in the bottom left hand corner, directly to you.
David.

The last æve n years have obviously been confusing and unhappy for you: It's time to follow up your letter to us with some action, if you are not going to waste any more of your life.

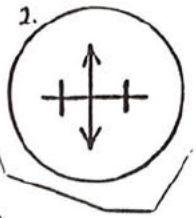
You need to discover that you can talk to people about your sexuality without the world falling apart. Whether you call yourself queer, homosexual, gay or bisexual doesn't matter as long as somehow you can move from the position you are in now to one where you can say 'I love men - isn't that great!' Once you have confidence that the homosexual part of yourself is OK you will probably develop more confidence that the heterosexual part is OK too, and doubts about performance will subside. If you can grow to love yourself others will find you more loveable.

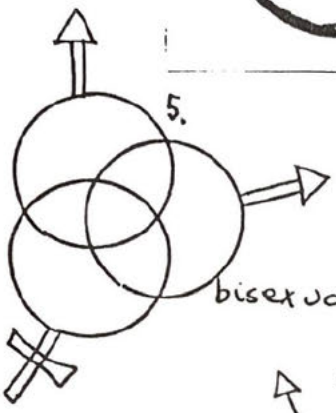
Some suggestions on how to start talking to people about it: Try mentioning the fact that you are bisexual to some new social contacts initially - see how unshocked they are - isn't it positively trendy again at the moment? Leave your parents and workmates until later if you don't feel they would be supportive.

For some more intensive talking try the local Gay Switchboard again (you must have been very unlucky with your first contact) and ask what counselling is available locally. Or talk to your GP and ask to be referred to a sympathetic counsellor. Or phone the contacts of the Nottingham Gay social group listed in Gay News - or come to the London Bisexual Group Meeting next time you visit London.

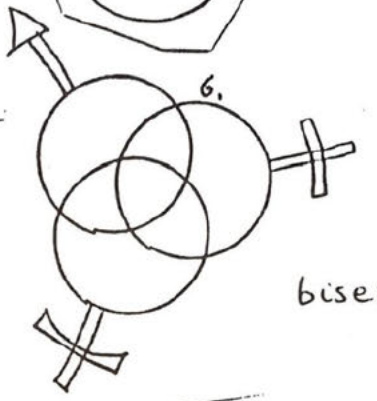
What is worrying you about meeting people you know in a gay pub? Surely they'll either be gay themselves or at least sympathetic to the idea. Test yourself out by going into a gay pub for 15 mins. to start with - drink one drink and leave. You would be very lucky to make contact with anyone the first time anyway, as people would pick up your nervousness and if you are lucky enough for someone to talk to you or you manage to begin a conversation with someone - tell them how nervous you are.

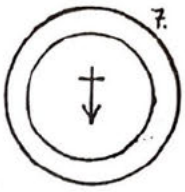
If all this is threatening - start by buying gay magazines and reading as many positive books about being gay as you can find. It's time for you to let some fun into your life ...

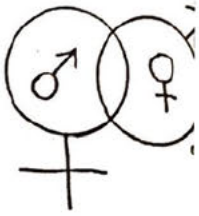




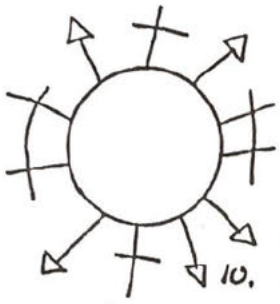
bisexual man

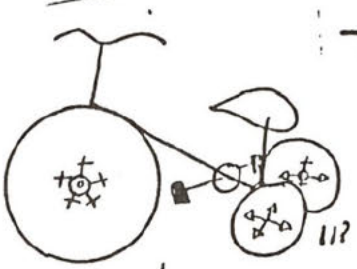






bisexual woman





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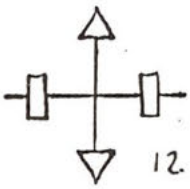
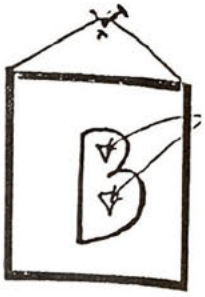
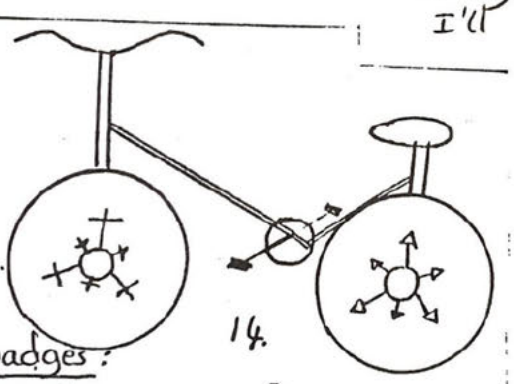
I'll tri anything?

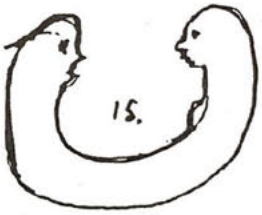


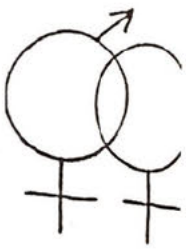


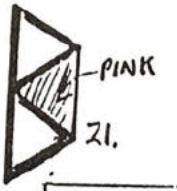


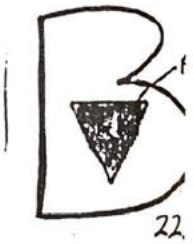
graffiti or badges:

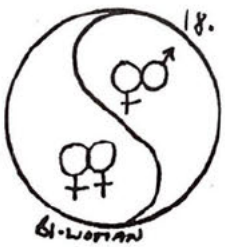
Hi, i'm bi!

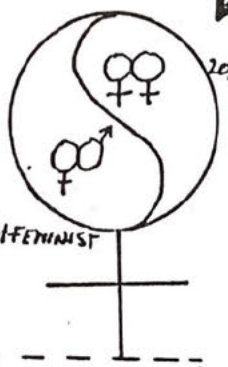












HERE ARE ALL THE ENTRIES FOR THE LOGO COMPETITION.
FILL IN THE COUPON TELLING US THE NUM OF THE ENTRY YOU THINK WILL MAKE THE BEST SYMBOL FOR BISEXUALS AND SEND IT TO BM/BI, LONDON WC1 3XX

1st choice number.....

2nd choice number.....

3rd choice number.....

Name.....

Town.....

beyond roles

JOHN BARKER

In order to live with peace of mind, we may go in search of ideas and beliefs which will support the way we currently view things. We may argue away or choose not to see things which we don't want to know about due to the unease or conflict which would result. We have a need to make sense of our experiences. Comfort is drawn from being able to slot into place those novel experiences, realizations and feelings which confront us unexpectedly or hang around challenging our frames of reference and our ways of seeing. Once we have managed to integrate the new phenomenon, we relax in the security that all is well with our view on the world. There is no longer the lingering fear of the unknown and whether this will force values and beliefs into the melting pot.

As children, we learnt to absorb 'facts' about the world in which we grew. As things pieced themselves together, it seemed as though they had always been that way and were immutable. For some the ways of the world were God-given and for others elevated to a position of quasi-divine. No-way should one challenge the basic premises of our conditioning and socialization!! Although there is a recognition that society has to change and 'progress', a contradiction exists at a most fundamental level. Moralists believe they have got things right, even though no-one has yet succeeded in preventing change. They attempt to maintain a static view on the world, on how we should relate to each other, whether by sex, age, physical or mental abilities. We may all do this to some degree but the more we are aware of it the more the dangers will be lessened.

Family, friends, neighbours and formalised institutions of education, mass media, law, medicine and welfare combine and collude to reinforce the way things are and 'should' be. In fact there is mounting evidence that they hinder our ability to cope with change or bring it about. Although we live in a society which is changing in many respects at a pace never seen before, this is not reflected in our 'preparation for living'.

Dominant groups assert their construction of 'reality' and sweep aside alternatives which, however valid or rational, could lead to a weakening in the structure of power relationships. Our socialization attempts to instil a respect for "authority" and anything associated with it. The end result in some instances is to act on the basis of that authority as valid in itself, rather than through an acceptance of its rationale.

Dominant beliefs serve to shape the way we create social relationships, the ways in which we make sense of and experience our very existence, even 'who' we love and 'how' this is expressed. We step out of line at our peril and if struggling alone risk being ostracised or ignored. Questioning the status quo may be acceptable to a point, as long as it is kept within the confines of a "phase" to be outgrown. There must be no threat to the tried and tested gotta-be-right ways of the world. The big danger is that beliefs can be transmuted into 'science' to give respectability, quasi-validity and worse, distract us for a lifetime from seeing basic flaws in the whole foundation and construction of things. Start from a false premise and a wonderful delusional system can be erected, into which we can all become lost and frustrated. ▷

The greatest problem as I see it is that of being pushed into theoretical moulds, which are not for our convenience. Theories, values, beliefs and norms which are of benefit to us are those which take account of our own interests and innermost needs. Put simply, I find it alarming how much people are being constructed to fit theories. When they don't fit predetermined moulds there is everything from brutal to subtle means of knocking them into something resembling the desired shape.

Dominant views may 'feel' correct until something fundamental strikes a chord, suggesting that all is not what it seems, when a morass of cherished ideas, beliefs and social constraints may grip the imagination. An analogy is the puzzle which seems impossible or absurd because our tho thought patterns have been conditioned to function in such a way as to make an obvious answer impossible to see. Only a new route such as 'lateral thinking' provides a solution. When found we marvel at why the answer seemed so elusive. What then of the ways in which we feel and relate to each other - surely we haven't got it all wrong?

Something happens which forces us to question how we are expected to f feel and relate. If there is no social identity with others, doubts may arise in our own minds as to our 'normality'. Such potential turning points can be very rewarding if the challenge which faces us is accepted. However, there is also the danger that faced alone, psychological reductionism and negative introspection can set in. Anachronistic 'therapies' can be wheeled in to our rescue, drawing on dominant theories and maintaining the spotlight on the 'personal', rather than widening the view to social and political dimensions of our lives. Most therapies offer personal liberation without social change, often justifying or rationalizing this on the assumption that only individuals can be reached with 'therapy'. The effect is to sell conformity and compliance to the order of things, however flawed.

THERAPY 'FIXATED'

Those therapies and philosophies which do not make explicit their politics are unlikely to free the imagination or provide scope for the discovering of oneself. 'Insight' is unlikely to be gained without the acceptance of the authority and wisdom of the counsellor. Going off in pursuit of a different social or personal reality would be 'resistance'. The assertive counsellor can project their construction of social reality in such a confident manner that the vulnerable 'client', seeking their own coherent view of things, is not freed to make their own exploration and discoveries. Equally, a woolly counsellor may be useless at helping to reorganize the pieces of one's experiences, knowing what to discard or retain and finding a new meaning and way forward.

When the challenge we are faced with is about emotional and sexual experiences, striking at the very core of our needs - the need for intimacy with others - there is little chance of finding therapists or counsellors who have graduated from cherished theories about polarized and fixed sexuality. Not only is the dichotomy false and oppressive, some of the supporting ideas are laughable in their inconsistency. Consider the social creation of problems by ideas such as the heterosexual who engages in minor homosexual actions, more than just a "phase" which they value and enjoy. Their label or diagnosis? "Latent homosexual" and from gays themselves "repressed" or "closet gay". On the other hand, consider the gay person who values a small amount of heterosexual activity - no, not a latent heterosexual, a repressed or closet 'straight'. Just a person unable to accept their homosexuality and fighting against it.

Such thinking when wrapped up as therapy generates confusion and uncertainties for the large number of people who do not fit neatly into either/or syndromes. Being pushed to either end of the sexual continuum forces a denial of an important ▷

dimension of oneself, even to the point of living a one-dimensional life. There is no scope for complementary experiences of both forms in whatever degree each person needs. There is no recognition given to the emotional and sexual, whether they come together as one or are experienced separately. There is no distinction made between phantasies (eg masturbatory) and actual experiences. There is no scope for a shift in the balance of needs, which could be a continuous and dynamic process.

FEAR OF FREEDOM

The idea of sexuality being fluid, or of bisexuality (which is used here as an umbrella term, to cover those who fall somewhere in between the two polar types on the sexual continuum), challenges and threatens both gays and straights. It challenges and threatens the rigidity and polarity of sexuality as inculcated by social institutions. It is as threatening as advocating polygamy. Threat because it takes away the clarity about how to relate, with fixed reference points about where we are in the world. Those unsure of themselves may feel too threatened to have so many possibilities opened up, not knowing where a new step might lead, how others will react. Those unable to muster the courage to explore will discover greater complexities in relating to others. They will also discover more scope for fulfilment of a kind which transcends all else.

In the long term, such an exploration of needs is sure to throw into question not only a priori assumptions about social, emotional and sexual relatedness but other aspects of western culture, eg primary socialization of our children, life-long monogamy or serial dyads, religion, the work ethic and cut-throat competition, let alone institutionalized sexism.

TO BE OR WHAT TO BE

Undoubtedly many people do have polarised sexualities. If such identities are true reflections of their intimate needs there is nothing to be challenged, especially if these have been carefully thought through and are more than mere accidental products of earlier experience. Both gays and straights offer fairly distinct worlds or cultures which have their own prescriptions and proscriptions about acceptable behaviour. The need to 'belong' or have a social identity with others is strong. Those who do not have polarized sexualities may feel uncomfortable in either culture. There may be attractive and unattractive elements in both, the discomfort being more acute if involvement in one feels like disloyalty to the other. It is as though we are accepted into either culture on the tacit condition that we agree to abide by the rules governing conduct, attitudes and values. When the rules suit those playing the game they can be affirming. When it is not possible to find others playing the right game frustration can at times feel intolerable. As one door opens so another may have to be closed. Fitting into other peoples rules or theories forces contortions of oneself into a mould for survival rather than living.

To get beyond a crude understanding of sexuality, we need a better understanding of intimacy and to see beyond 'playing roles'. Theories about social systems have tended to intrude into intimate relationships. Role theory about being a daughter, son, wife, husband, mother, father, gay, straight, has led too often to conclusions about 'how' to be.

Where is the support to come from for those who, after much pressure to see themselves as gay or straight, come to the realization that they are neither? One identity that may arise in such circumstances is that of bisexuality. For some this will be an accurate reflection of the real them. Others may use the term as the nearest approximation but in either case, where will the support come from? It is too easy to list the social institutions which will not support such an orientation. Unless we are allowed, and even encouraged, to be true to ourselves and others, we have to ask how unfree some people are in free societies.

PART TWO NEXT ISSUE

Book Review

'Men... An investigation into the emotional male' by Phillip Hodson
Published by the BBC at £2.95

Are the days of macho men gone soon to be replaced by an era of sensitive, communicative human beings? And how do men retain a sense of worth when they feel their status in society is being eroded?

Women have long been conscious of their changing role in society and have made significant advances in achieving self-fulfillment. But their greater equality with men, particularly in the job market, coupled with a reduced emphasis on looking after the home, threatens the very values on which men have traditionally built their lives.

The introduction of automation in much of heavy industry and the high levels of male unemployment have also made many men aware that the male traits of strength and aggression are redundant: they are being forced to re-evaluate themselves in a society where new technology offers control at the push of a button.

Phillip Hodson's book 'Men...' deals with the subjects of male oppression and liberation in a lucid and sympathetic manner, based on his experience as a marriage guidance counsellor and as an 'agony uncle' for both LBC and the Daily Star. The scope is broader and more comprehensive than the associated BBC2 series: constrained by a 25 minute time-slot each programme concentrated mainly on case studies illustrative of a particular aspect of male life.

Much of 'Men...' examines how society's expectations can force men to repress their emotions whilst setting often unattainable performance goals in bed and at work. Poor communication between married couples is linked to some men's inability to understand the importance of emotional closeness, whilst impotence is related (in some cases) to a man's need to 'perform' when he is emotionally insecure. The central role of work in men's lives is expressed by the aggressive pursuit of promotion and power on the grounds that it can turn you into a person of importance, an illusion only too easily shattered by redundancy. Many men left without a job to fill their lives feel empty and worthless; some with working wives believe that they have been reduced to surrogate women doing 'women's work' around the home.

The answer to these problems is not to let society dictate the way in which men assess themselves - after all what favours do they owe to a society which throws men on the scrap heap and then calls them scroungers? Instead Phillip Hodson proposes that men re-evaluate their emotions, personal relationships, and other aspects which really make their lives meaningful. Good personal relationships, especially within the family, are far stronger and more resilient elements on which to build a life than the crumbling traditional values of work. A whole chapter is taken up with aggression with the recommendatic that excess aggression be released by taking up energetic sports such as squash - the desire to dominate can also be accommodated if one is a frequent winner!

My only real criticism is the rather broad-brush approach to men as a homc geneous group, despite a caveat earl on. In reality the attitudes of men from different social strata will be extremely varied, probably incorpora· ting only a small subset of the problems described - it is a shame that the most appropriate target audience is unlikely to read this really excellent little book.

APRIL

Sun 1 Teadance at Stallions. 5pm.

Tues 3 Video - Intimate Confessions (on being young & gay)
Non-competitive games

Tues 10 Guest speaker - Julian Heldrum of Hall Carpenter Archives

Sun 15 Ice skating at Queen's Ice Rink, Queensway W2. 2-5pm

* Tues 17 Dorothy Clare will discuss her own research on psychosexual identity
The Bluffer's Guide to Dance - workshop by Jules & partner

Tues 24 Transvestism & Transexuality - discussion led by Tish
Self-defence workshop by Stephanie

Fri 27 Alternative Cabaret - outing. Contact Matt M

MAY

Tues 1 The dilemas of multiple relationships - discussion led by Richard L
Self defence workshop by Stephanie

Sun 6 Teadance at Stallions. 5pm.

Tues 8 Guest speaker - Christopher Vincent of the Institute of Marital Studies "Marriage - is it a straight-jacket?"

* Tues 15 Feminism and Bisexuality - discussion led by Nadine
More Bluffer's Guide to Dance

Sun 20 Planning meeting at David's

Tues 22 Our Very Own Concert Party - volunteers contact Tish

Tues 29 The Third Sex - discussion led by Rachel
Writers' Workshop led by Phil (bring your own material to read)
Arthur's massage workshop

JUNE

Sun 3 Teadance at Stallions. 5pm

Tues 5 Guest Speaker - Ken Bills "Transactional Analysis - take charge of your own life"
Bisexuality in Literature - discussion led by James

Tues 12 Video - "Watch out there's a queer about" The police & Homosexuality
Arthur's massage workshop

* Tues 19 Dorothy Clare will lead an investigation into the links between hermaphroditism, androgeny and bisexuality
Arthur's massage workshop

Sun 24 Picnic, swimming and games from 2pm between the women's and men's pools, Hampstead Heath

Tues 26 Bisexuals and the Gay Movement - discussion led by Matt M
Non-competitive games

Sat 30 Gay Pride March - its great fun, be there!!

*The third tuesday of the month is particularly of interest to women although men are still welcome

At every meeting there will be a personal group

All meetings are held in Heaven, Under the Arches, off Villiers Street, Charing Cross, and begin at 8.30.

No.2 March 1984 50p

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2 Why SM Is Unacceptable

3 Bi Adventures In The Gay World

4 Definitions Of Bisexuality

7 Letters

8 Logo Competition

9 Beyond Roles

12 Book Review

13 LBG Programme